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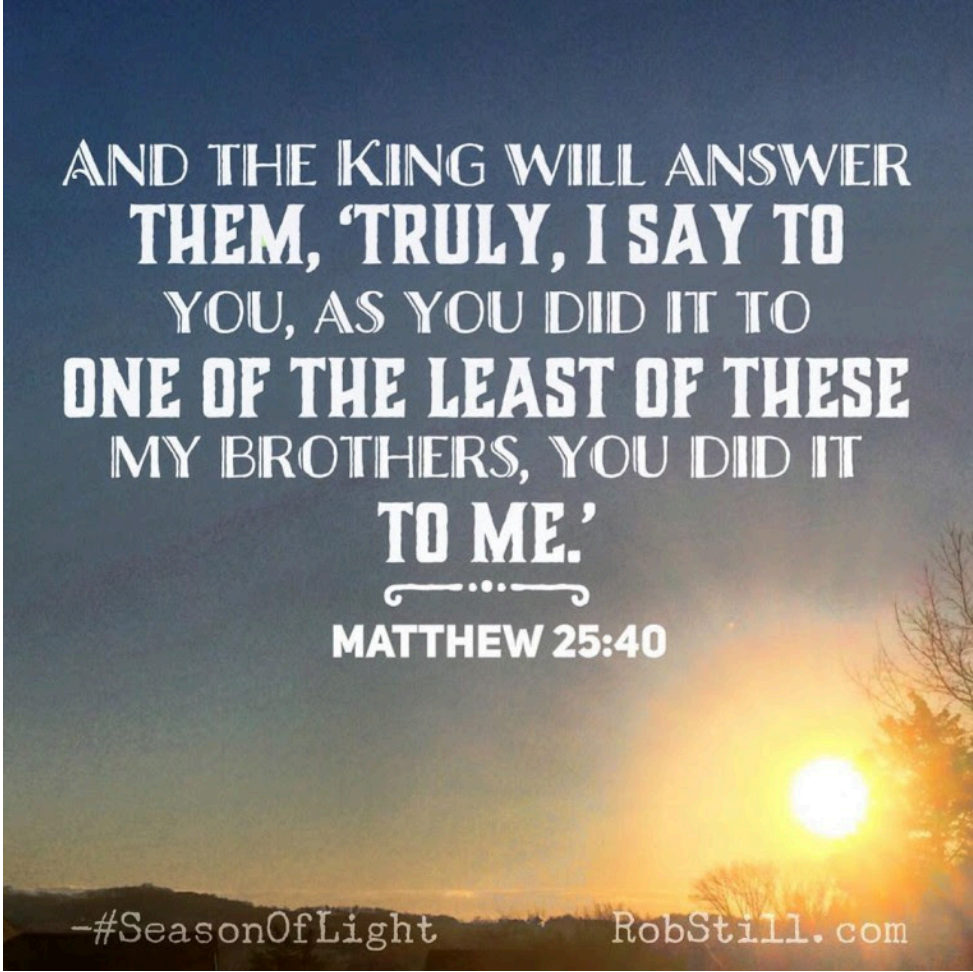
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**Z**eal for Kiel  
February 2025  
Ministry News

Two Americans  
serving God's people  
together with you in  
Germany

**Made for community**



AND THE KING WILL ANSWER  
THEM, 'TRULY, I SAY TO  
YOU, AS YOU DID IT TO  
ONE OF THE LEAST OF THESE  
MY BROTHERS, YOU DID IT  
TO ME.'

MATTHEW 25:40

-#SeasonOfLight

RobStill.com

"I feel so alone," said Markus, a young man from our church on the autism spectrum. "I miss being in Christian community. But I don't know how to connect with people."

Markus has attended IKC on and off for about 2 years. In the past, he was in a more stable place emotionally. He would often participate in worship services by reading scripture, praying and helping to set things up.

Then he suddenly stopped attending. Before he left, he sent a series of inappropriate text messages to some of the women in our congregation. While he did not have malicious intent (he is lonely and looking for love) he did make people very uncomfortable. As a result, some reacted with disgust/anger and others asked him to leave.

About a month ago, he returned. But things are different this time. He's noticeably less engaged, often standing awkwardly in the corner of the room, pacing back and forth during worship

services. He will talk with our pastors before and after the service. But otherwise, he avoids people. He's not sure how to engage and he's afraid to make another mistake.

He wants to apologize to the women for the discomfort he's caused. But he's not sure how to do this because he doesn't understand why the things he wrote were inappropriate. As a result, he feels judged and isolated when all he really wants (what any of us want) is to belong.

This story may seem hopeless, but it is not. What I love about IKC is the willingness on the part of our church leaders to give Markus another chance. And not just on "our terms," but on his terms, too. There is a willingness to make space for Markus and come alongside him in meaningful ways. To support, guide and help him find his place in the church.

This is no small thing. We have all seen countless examples of the opposite. Of fear-based/discriminatory behavior in the church toward those with special needs.

Neurodivergent parishioners sometimes take more time and energy to love than those who are neurotypical. But they are God's children, too; and are just as worthy of our time and attention as anyone else. If we as a church don't make room for them, who will? Can we see the face of Jesus in their faces? Just as importantly, can they see his face in *ours*?

Our pastors are in communication with the leadership team about how to best support Markus while also protecting the women in our community. It's not an easy balance, but facilitating the conversation with the goal of reconciliation and mutual transformation is central to our calling as a church.

*The question is: How do we in the church walk faithfully with people like Markus? How do we see Markus as a person (and not a problem) and help him toward healing and wholeness?*

First, we can take time to see and notice the Markuses in our midst. This seems obvious, but ask any special needs family and they will tell you how invisible and overlooked they sometimes feel in the church. "Seeing" Markus seems to be a huge part of

the answer. So many churches struggle to even notice or see people with special needs in their congregations. As humans, we tend to look away in denial when we're not sure how to help.

Are we guilty of being so intent on "doing ministry" that we sometimes forget Jesus' heart for the poor, the marginalized, and the differently abled? Caring for the vulnerable among us is one of our greatest callings as a church.

As Al Tizon, previous Executive Minister of Serve Globally once said, "When Jesus said to care for the least of these, who do you suppose he meant?"

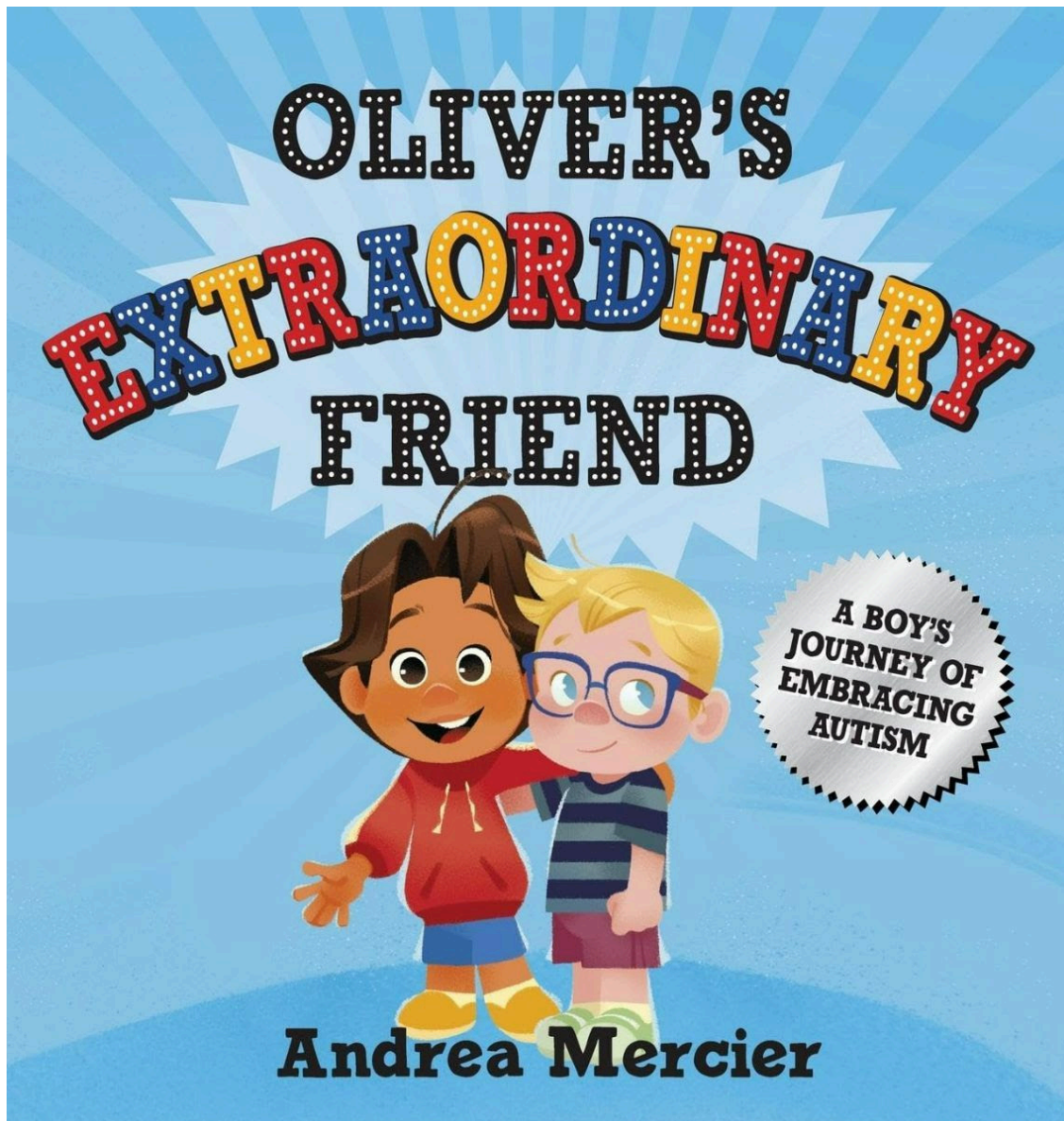
To ignore people in our communities just because they are challenging is to forsake our calling as a church. After all, Jesus said, "Whatever you do unto the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you do unto me."

We can't fix, save, or change anyone, nor should we try. What we can do is suspend judgment, ask questions and make room for the answers. We can facilitate healthy two-way conversations to rebuild trust. We can educate ourselves about the needs of special needs families. We can preach and teach on the subject, and in doing so, normalize and move the conversation forward.

More than anything, Markus wants to be a part of our church community again. Right now, full participation probably isn't possible until trust is rebuilt. This will take time. But in the meantime, we can welcome Markus to our community, make space for him and walk alongside him as he seeks to find his place in the church. Our church leaders are helping him communicate and connect with people in ways that are meaningful and life-giving for all.

Working with people is often *messy* work. Supporting and understanding people who are different than us is often *challenging* work. But this is absolutely the work of the church. If not us, then who? If not now, then when?

***What needs to change in our churches/thinking in order to better support and make space for those with special needs?***



Are you or your church looking to better understand and support those with special needs in the church?

Check out the following books, recommended by our dear friend and ministry partner, Andrea Mercier!

Andrea and her husband Michael have an 11-year-old son with Autism. She wrote "Oliver's Extraordinary Friend," based on the life and experiences of their son, Gabriel.

[Oliver's Extraordinary Friend](#) by Andrea Mercier

[Unbroken Faith: Spiritual Recovery for the Special Needs](#)

[Parent](#) by Diane Dokko Kim



[Leading a Special Needs Ministry](#) by Amy Fenton Lee



**Our sweet, spunky, sassy, classy Charlotte turned 12 on January 26! She and her friends celebrated at the mall with bubble tea, shopping and Chinese food! We are glad to be her parents and grateful for the kind and caring young woman she is growing up to be.**



**With prayer and thanksgiving...**

- Praise God for our daughter Charlotte who turned 12 on 1/26!**
- Praise God for 2 successful IKC workshops in January for our Worship and IT teams.**
- Pray for Stephanie as she joins the preaching rotation at IKC.**
- Pray for Phillip and Tom as they accompany Markus, a man with autism, as he seeks to reconcile with some in our faith community and find his place in the church.**
- Pray for our quarterly business meetings (online) with Europe Serve Globally colleagues this month.**
- Pray for our political leaders in Germany as currently there is much tension around the topic of proposed changes to immigration policy.**



**-Pray for Gabby as she travels to Plön 2/11-14 for a big-band retreat/workshop.**



**Thank you for your faithful prayers, friendship and financial partnership! We are so grateful to be your partners in mission and ministry.**

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